CLAIMS

1   1. A mail piece tracking system including:

2   A. one or more servers for linking mail piece delivery status information with

3   user identifiers and producing listings of the delivery status information for

4   mail pieces directed to the respective users; and

5   B. one or more browsers or client executables through which the respective users

6   associated with the user identifiers access the delivery status information.

1   2. The mail piece tracking and tracing system of claim 1 wherein the one or more serv-

2   ers

3   a. further associate with the delivery status information for a given mail piece a

4   message from the mail piece sender, and

5   b. include a link to the message in the listing of the delivery status information.

1   3. The mail piece tracking and tracing system of claim 1 wherein the one or more serv-

2   ers

3   a. further associate with the delivery status information for a given mail piece

4   related transaction information, and

5   b. include a link to the transaction information in the listing of the delivery status

6   information.

1   4. The mail piece tracking and tracing system of claim 1 wherein the one or more serv-

2   ers

3   a. further associate information relating to the contents of the mail piece with the

4   delivery status information, and

5   b. include the information relating to the contents in a listing of the mail piece

6   delivery status information.

1   5. The mail piece tracking and tracing system of claim 1 wherein the one or more serv-

2   ers includes in the mail piece delivery status information

17

3   i.   a sender identifier,

4   ii.   a mail type identifier, and

5   iii.   a delivery service identifier.

1   6.   The mail piece tracking and tracing system of claim 5 wherein the one or more serv-

2   ers further includes in the mail piece delivery status information related messages

3   from the sender and the delivery service.

1   7.   The mail piece tracking and tracing system of claim 5 wherein the one or more serv-

2   ers further includes in the mail piece delivery status information links to on-line in-

3   formation provided by or associated with the sender.

1   8.   A method for tracking and tracing mail pieces including the steps of:

2   A.   associating respective users with user identifiers;

3   B.   associating with the identified users mail pieces directed to or sent by the re-

4   spective users;

5   C.   linking mail piece delivery status information relating to the respective mail

6   pieces to the respective user identifiers;

7   D.   providing to a given user a listing of the respective mail pieces and the associ-

8   ated mail piece delivery status information that is linked to the user identifier

9   that corresponds to the given user.

1   9.   The method of tracking and tracing mail pieces of claim 8 wherein

2   a.   the step of linking mail piece delivery status information to the user identifiers

3   includes updating the information, and

4   b.   the step of providing a listing of mail piece delivery status information in-

5   cludes providing in the list the updated information.

1   10.   The method of tracking and tracing mail pieces of claim 8 wherein the step of linking

2   mail piece delivery status information with the user identifiers includes associating

3   therewith information that identifies the senders.

18

11. The method of tracking and tracing mail pieces of claim 10 wherein the step of linking mail piece delivery status information with the user identifiers includes associating therewith messages from the respective senders.

12. The method of tracking and tracing mail pieces of claim 8 wherein the step of linking mail piece delivery status information with the user identifiers includes associating therewith information that identifies the respective mail piece delivery services.

13. The method of tracking and tracing mail pieces of claim 11 wherein the step of linking mail piece delivery status information to the user identifiers includes associating therewith messages from the respective delivery services.

14. The method of tracking and tracing mail pieces of claim 8 wherein the step of providing a listing includes providing a graphical interface connected to notify the user that corresponds to a given user identifier of the delivery status of mail pieces addressed to the user.

15. The method of tracking and tracing mail pieces of claim 14 in which the interface is configured to display icons indicating different types of mail pieces addressed to the user.

16. The method of tracking and tracing mail pieces of claim 14 in which the interface is configured to display delivery dates associated with the mail pieces.

17. The method of tracking and tracing mail pieces of claim 16 in which the interface is configured to display the date a given the mail piece was logged into a postal delivery service.

19

1   18. The method of tracking and tracing mail pieces of claim 16 in which the interface is

2   configured to display the date on which delivery of a given mail piece is expected to

3   occur.

1   19. The method of tracking and tracing mail pieces of claim 16 in which the interface is

2   configured to display the date on which delivery of given mail piece was made.

1   20. The method of tracking and tracing mail pieces of claim 14 in which the interface is

2   configured to display information concerning the source of a given mail piece..

1   21. The method of tracking and tracing mail pieces of claim 14 in which the interface is

2   configured to provide information concerning the contents of a given mail piece.

1   22. The method of tracking and tracing mail pieces of claim 14 in which the interface is

2   configured to provide an image of at least a portion of the contents of a given mail

3   piece.

1   23. The method of tracking and tracing mail pieces of claim 14 in which the interface is

2   configured to provide an image of information associated with a given mail piece.

1   24. The method of tracking and tracing mail pieces of claim 23 in which the interface is

2   configured to provide one or more messages associated with a given mail piece.

1   25. The method of tracking and tracing mail pieces of claim 14 in which the interface is

2   configured to provide one or more links to information provided by a sender of a

3   given mail piece.

26. The method of tracking and tracing mail pieces of claim 25 wherein the information provided by the sender includes one or more of transaction history, account balance, and payment option information.

27. Computer-readable memory comprising computer program instructions for use in providing mail piece tracking and tracing, the instructions when executed causing:

    A. one or more servers to link mail piece delivery status information with user identifiers and produce listings of the delivery status information for mail pieces directed to the respective users; and

    B. one or more browsers to provide access to the delivery status information linked to a given user identifier.

28. The computer-readable memory of claim 27 further including computer program instructions that when executed cause the one or more servers to

    a. further associate with the delivery status information for a given mail piece a message from the mail piece sender, and

    b. include a link to the message in the listing of the delivery status information.

29. The computer-readable memory of claim 27 further including computer program instructions that when executed cause the one or more servers to

    a. further associate with the delivery status information for a given mail piece related transaction information, and

    b. include a link to the transaction information in the listing of the delivery status information.

30. The computer-readable memory of claim 27 further including computer program instructions that when executed cause the one or more servers to

    a. further associate information relating to the contents of the mail piece with the delivery status information, and

    b. include the information relating to the contents in a listing of the mail piece delivery status information.

31. The computer-readable memory of claim 27 further including computer program instructions that when executed cause the one or more servers to include in the mail piece delivery status information
    a. a sender identifier,
    b. a mail type identifier, and
    c. a delivery service identifier.

32. The computer-readable memory of claim 31 further including computer program instructions that when executed cause the one or more servers to include in the mail piece delivery status information related messages from the sender and the delivery service.

33. The computer-readable memory of claim 31 further including computer program instructions that when executed cause the one or more servers to include in the mail piece delivery status information links to on-line information provided by or associated with the sender.

34. A method of operating a computer system, the method including the steps of:
    A. associating a given user session with a user identifier;
    B. retaining messages relating to the status of the session at a server and including in each message a message sequence number and an attribute that is associated with the user identifier; and
    C. using the messages to continue the session from a point at which the session last communicated with the server, in response to the user identifier being presented at a node that communicates with the server.

35. The method of claim 34 further including a step of maintaining an index of the messages, the index being sorted by the attribute that is associated with the user identifier.

36. The method of claim 35 further including

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2   i.   a step of communicating through the session and providing information relat-

3   ing to a mailing label;

4   ii.   in the step of retaining messages retaining messages that include the informa-

5   tion relating to the mailing label;

6   iii.   in the step of continuing the session presenting the retained information relat-

7   ing to the mailing label; and

8   iv.   a step of ending the session by printing the mailing label in accordance with

9   the retained information.

1   37.   The method of claim 36 further including

2   i.   in the step of communicating through the session providing information re-

3   lating to postage for a mail piece;

4   ii.   in the step of retaining messages retaining messages that include the informa-

5   tion relating to the postage;

6   iii.   in the step of continuing the session presenting the retained information relat-

7   ing to the postage; and

8   vii.   in the step of ending the session printing the postage in accordance with the

9   retained information.

1   38.   The method of claim 35 further including

2   a.   a step of communicating through the session and providing information relating to

3   postage for a mail piece;

4   b.   in the step of retaining messages retaining messages that include the information

5   relating to the postage;

6   c.   in the step of continuing the session presenting the retained information relating to

7   the postage; and

8   d.   a step of ending the session by printing the postage in accordance with the re-

9   tained information.

1   39. A method of operating a computer network including the steps of:

2   A. associating a user session with a user identifier that is presented to gain access to

3   information maintained by the network from a first node that communicates with

4   the network;

5   B. retaining a queue of messages relating to the user session and associating the

6   queue with the user identifier; and

7   C. in response to the user identifier being later presented at the first node or a second

8   node that communicates over the network, continuing the user session at the first

9   or second node by using the messages to present the session at the point at which

10   the session last communicated with the server.

1   40. The method of claim 36 wherein the step of retaining a queue of messages includes

2   indexing the messages by the user identifier.

1   41. The method of claim 37 wherein the step of retaining a queue of messages further

2   includes maintaining the queue at each of a plurality of interconnected nodes, a given one

3   of the interconnected nodes at which the user identifier is provided presenting the user

4   session at the point at which the session last communicated with the server.

1   42. The method of claim 38 further including conducting the user session by communi-

2   cating over the network using a browser or a client executable.

1   43. The method of claim 37 wherein the step of presenting the user identifier includes

2   providing a machine-readable code to a scanner that communicates with the node.

1   44. A method of operating a postal service computer system, the method including the

2   steps of:

3   A. associating a given user postal mailing label session with a user identifier;

4   B. retaining messages relating to the status of the session at a server and including in

5   each message a message sequence number and an attribute that is associated with

6   the user identifier, the messages further including mailing label information pro-

7   vided through the session; and

8   C. using the messages to continue the session from a point at which the session last

9   communicated with the server by presenting the mailing label information pro-

10   vided through the session, in response to the user identifier being presented at a

11   node that communicates with the server.

1   45. The method of claim 44 further including a step of maintaining an index of the mes-

2   sages, the index being sorted by the attribute that is associated with the user identifier.

1   46. The method of claim 45 further including the step of ending the continued session by

2   printing the mailing label in accordance with the retained information.

1   47. The method of claim 46 further including

2   a. in the step of retaining messages retaining messages that include the information re-

3   lating to postage;

4   b. in the step of continuing the session presenting the retained information relating to the

5   postage; and

6   c. in the step of ending the session printing the postage in accordance with the retained

7   information.